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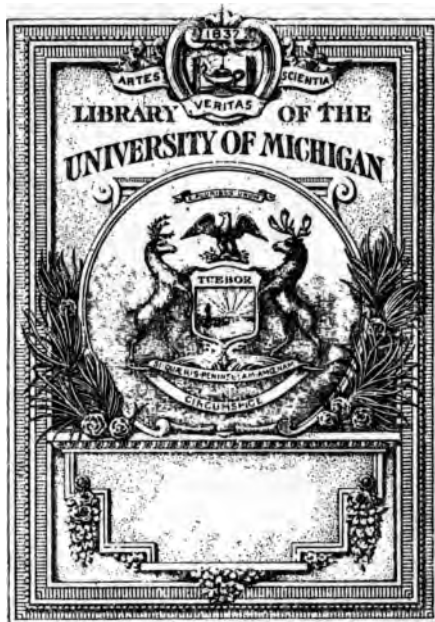
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ON THE

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1895

HISTORY

OF THE

ENGLISH LANGUAGE;

A LECTURE DELIVERED AT LIVERPOOL ON THE 23RD APRIL, 1857,
BEFORE THE

HISTORIC SOCIETY OF LANCASHIRE AND CHESHIRE,

BY

THOMAS WRIGHT, ESQ., M.A., F.S.A., &c.,

CORRESPONDING MEMBER OF THE IMPERIAL INSTITUTE OF FRANCE,
(ACADEMIE DES INSCRIPTIONS ET BELLES LETTRES.)

REPRINTED FROM THE TRANSACTIONS OF THE HISTORIC SOCIETY, VOL. IX.

LIVERPOOL:

T. BRAKELL, PRINTER, COOK STREET.

1857.



TO
JOSEPH MAYER, ESQ., F.S.A., &c.,

OF LIVERPOOL,

AT WHOSE REQUEST THIS LECTURE WAS WRITTEN AND DELIVERED,

IT IS DEDICATED BY THE AUTHOR,

AS A TESTIMONY OF PERSONAL FRIENDSHIP,

AND OF RESPECT AND GRATITUDE FOR HIS EARNEST

AND VALUABLE EXERTIONS FOR THE PROMOTION OF

ARCHÆOLOGICAL AND HISTORICAL SCIENCE.

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ON THE HISTORY OF THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE.

By Thomas Wright, Esq., M.A., F.S.A.

I think few will deny that our attention could hardly be called to a more interesting or important subject than that of the language we speak. Language is in a manner the index of our existence, it is intimately connected with all our domestic relations as well as with our relations to other peoples, and the history of our own language is specially to us that of ourselves as a race of mankind. We have reason, therefore, to be surprised that it is a subject with which people in general are little acquainted, and that it has hitherto been taught so imperfectly and so incorrectly in our ordinary course of education ; and this I am sure you will accept as my excuse for taking it for my subject on the present occasion.

Some fifteen centuries ago, a great portion of Europe was absorbed in the vast empire of Rome, which included this island, with the exception of the wild districts of the extreme north, and which on the continent had a varying frontier extending from the Rhine to the Danube. With few exceptions, such as those of the Armoricans and the Aquitanians (represented by the modern population of Brittany and the Basque countries) and that of Greece, Rome had imposed her own language upon the conquered provinces, and at the time of which I am speaking, the population of as much of western Europe as formed part of the empire, spoke generally the Latin tongue. I believe that this was strictly the case with the Roman province of Britain, and that nearly four hundred years of uninterrupted occupation, with a current of recruits of all sorts to the colonists, perhaps in proportion more continual even than that in modern times of the United States of America, had entirely effaced the primitive character of its population. The Celtic race, driven everywhere before the civilization of Rome or the hostility of the Teutons, had found its last refuge to the West in Ireland, and I am inclined to think that we must look to the Irish language as the real representative of the Celtic dialects which were spoken in Britain before its occupation by the Romans. It appears to me most probable that the population of the North of Scotland was Teutonic—German or Scandinavian. On the

Continent, the vast sweep of territory to the north of the Roman frontier, in nearly its whole extent, was occupied by the great Teutonic race, in its various divisions of high German, in which the Goths were included, Low German, occupying the countries in the west up to the Danish peninsula, and Scandinavian, which included the Danes and the Swedes, the Norwegians, and North-western islanders—in fact, the Northmen.

It is no part of my plan to enter further into the divisions of the Teutonic race on the Continent, or into their relations with the empire. You all know that the Teutons eventually overrun and conquered the Roman provinces, and that three distinct tribes of the Low Germans,—the Angles, the Saxons, and the Jutes,—made themselves masters of Britain. The establishment of the Teutons in the Roman provinces brought with it a change of language, as well as of manners and political feelings, on one part or the other, according to a variety of circumstances into which I will not now enter. On the Continent, over nearly the whole extent of the western empire, the modern languages are derived from the Latin, and were known during the whole period of the middle ages by the name of Roman. In England the Teutonic language completely superseded the Latin, for several causes, of which one was no doubt the circumstance, that for a long period previous to the final breaking up of the western empire, the population of Britain had been continually and largely increased by the immigration of German settlers, so that the German spirit was far more powerful than the Roman.

The notion will naturally suggest itself to you, that, as three different Teutonic peoples conquered the island of Britain, they must have imported into it three languages instead of one. This notion, however, is only correct in a certain sense; for the languages talked by the different German tribes, or states, had not at that time so far diverged in form as to hinder them from easily intermixing and coalescing. The different branches of the Low Germans could not only understand one another with perfect ease, but they could probably intercommunicate with their next neighbours, either of the high German tongue or of the Scandinavian, with at least as little difficulty as at the present day a Lancashire peasant would discourse with a Yorkshireman. In fact, what are now distinct languages were then represented only by cognate dialects. There can be no doubt that there was a strong difference of dialect, from the earliest period of their settlement in this island, between the languages spoken by the Angles, the

Saxons, and the Jutes, and these divisions were the foundations of the great classes of the modern dialects of England. The Jutes, represented chiefly by the kingdom of Kent, were the least numerous of the three Teutonic peoples of Britain, and, although, probably from their position, they had at an early period attained to a great degree of commercial prosperity, riches, and power, they exercised no permanent influence, either political or much less literary, on the great Anglo-Saxon confederacy. It was the Angles, who were numerically by far the most powerful of the Teutonic settlers, who first took the lead in intelligence and in literature. The earliest literary productions of the Anglo-Saxons, and the oldest Anglo-Saxon traditions known, appear to belong chiefly to the family of the Angles, and their influence over the rest was so great, that not only did these accept from them the general title of *Englisc*, but even the nations of the continent who had preserved the Roman language, generally agreed in giving to the Teutonic population of Britain the name of *Angli*. Thus we derive from this one branch of the triple composition of our race the national name of which we are proud, that of Englishmen, and it is from them that our language was called ENGLISH. Nevertheless, the Anglian division of the race fell in the course of the eighth century under the superior influence of the Saxons, and Wessex, or the kingdom of the West-Saxons, not only gave us finally our line of kings, but furnished us with the model of our language and literature. The written English language of the present day is founded upon that dialect in which King Alfred wrote, and which held in Saxon England somewhat the same position as the Attic dialect in ancient Greece. With this change in the predominance of race, the term *Saxon* came into more frequent use to designate the Teutonic population of this island, and, as there continued to be Saxons on the Continent as well as in England, it has become the practise to call our own ancestors, by way of distinction and not as indicating an amalgamation of race, the ANGLO-SAXONS, that is, the Saxons of England. Yet so permanent are early ethnological principles, that though the Saxon dynasty, the Saxon dialect, and the Saxon laws, became those of the whole Anglo-Saxon people, the older and particular designation has outlived all changes in the names we now possess of Englishmen, the English language, and England.

The Anglo-Saxon language—under which appellation we now include the language of the Teutonic settlers in Britain in its three great divisions—

was one hardly less complicated in its grammatical forms and inflections, when first introduced into this island, than that of ancient Greece. But, at the earliest period at which we know it, the Anglo-Saxon language was already undergoing a degradation from its primitive forms and all the other changes to which languages in general are subject. At the end of the Saxon period much of the language had already become obsolete. In the first place, it was very copious in words, and one word to express a particular idea was continually going out of fashion to give place to another. In the second place, a very important portion of the language in the earlier stage of its history, that of poetry, had become obsolete in the mass. The language of poetry in Anglo-Saxon was originally distinguished, not only by its peculiar phraseology, but by the use of a class of words which were rarely met with in the ordinary language of life, and which evidently belonged to the minstrel class, and to what we may call the heroic age. The writers of poetry at a later period seem to have lost the command of this language, and their verses, though still possessing the metrical forms, had become in other respects, of course with some exceptions, remarkably prosaic. I doubt whether people in general, at the close of the Anglo-Saxon period, understood the older language of poetry, and very few of its words were carried forward into semi-Saxon or preserved in later English.

I am one of those who do not believe in the existence of a Celtic element in the English language.* I have no doubt that the Anglo-Saxons found in this island a people talking Latin, and if any portion of the population really continued to use the Celtic tongue, it must have been a small and unimportant class, who are not likely to have exercised any influence

* It must not be forgotten that the Teutonic and Celtic languages, are, after all, only two branches from the same original stock, and we very naturally expect to find a great number of roots common to both, and similar forms of words presenting themselves with similar meanings, without any reason for supposing that the one language borrowed them from the other. Moreover, I am perfectly satisfied that the Welsh language, as we know it, contains a considerable number of words which have been taken directly, not only from Anglo-Saxon, or English, but from Anglo-Norman also, and the former perhaps, only came into the Welsh language since the Norman Conquest. These two circumstances seem to me quite sufficient to account for the verbal coincidences pointed out in a paper by the Rev. J. Davies, recently published by the Philological Society, as far as those coincidences are real. We are not unacquainted with the history of the Anglo-Saxons in this country, and I believe that that history is quite contrary to the notion that at the time of the Norman Conquest there was any such mixture of the Celtic race with the Teutonic population as could have exercised any influence either on the language or on the character of the people.

on the language of the new conquerors. The evidences of this are numerous, and, to me at least, very satisfactory, but they do not form a part of our subject upon which I can dwell at present. The German race had a term for those who were of a different race from themselves, which was represented in Anglo-Saxon by the noun *wealh*, a foreigner, and by the adjective *welisc* or *wylisc*, foreign, but which, as the Romans were the only race quite different from their own with which they had much acquaintance, they applied especially and almost solely to people speaking the Latin tongue. During the middle ages, the term Welsh, in the German languages of the Continent, meant especially French, but was applied also to other neo-Latin dialects; in German of the present day the same word (*wälsch*) is applied peculiarly to the language and people of Italy. It was no doubt for the same reason, namely, that they were a people speaking Latin, that the Anglo-Saxons applied this word to the population they found in Britain, and it probably became extended to what we now call Wales and the Welsh, merely because, when they subsequently became acquainted with them, the Anglo-Saxons confounded the inhabitants of that district with the other old inhabitants of South Britain. You must bear in mind, in considering this question, that our knowledge of the Anglo-Saxon language is after all imperfect, for our nomenclature is made up from written documents of a partial description, and there no doubt existed a great number of words in the Anglo-Saxon language which are now entirely lost. No doubt many words now found in the English language, and especially in the provincial dialects, of which the origin is now unknown, had their equivalents in pure Anglo-Saxon.

If I object to the notion of a Celtic element in our language, I object no less to that of a mixture with any other Teutonic dialect. Our older philologists believed in a modification of the Anglo-Saxon during a certain period which they termed Dano-Saxon, supposing that they traced in it the marks of Danish influence; but this theory has been entirely abandoned by the best of our modern scholars, and there certainly are no proofs that such an influence ever existed.* The language which our forefathers spoke in the middle of the eleventh century was the same Low German dialect

* Of course I do not deny that our local dialects, in the parts occupied by them, may have derived some words from the Danes, but the pure Anglo-Saxon language was certainly not influenced by them. It has been the fashion of late years to ascribe much more to the Danes than I believe them to have any claim to. This, however, is question the discussion of which would take us too far away from the present subject.

which they had brought with them into the island, with the mere changes which any language would undergo in itself during the transmission, under the same circumstances, through several centuries.

At the period just mentioned, a great political event, the Norman conquest, brought into our island a new language, one of those which had grown out of the language of the Roman empire, French, as it was then talked and written in Normandy; and Anglo-Norman, as this neo-Latin dialect is usually termed, continued during two centuries from that time to be exclusively the language of the aristocracy of England. There were thus two entirely distinct languages, bearing no resemblance to each other, co-existent in different classes of the same nation, for we must not suppose that, for a moment, the Anglo-Saxon, or, as we must henceforward call it, the English tongue, was abandoned or fell into disuse. It was long, indeed, an uncontradicted statement of our historians, that William the Conqueror made a deliberate attempt to suppress the use of the Anglo-Saxon tongue in his new kingdom, and Ingulph, or rather probably the pretender who assumed his name, asserts that it was banished from schools, and that the French or Anglo-Norman was used in its place in teaching children the rudiments of Latin grammar. The former of these statements no longer receives any credit, and the latter is disproved by an abundance of positive evidence. We cannot, indeed, doubt that the Anglo-Saxon grammar of the Latin language by Alfric continued to be used in the English schools until late in the twelfth century. Hicks, the Anglo-Saxon scholar, had in his possession a manuscript of Alfric's grammar, with an interlinear gloss of some of the Saxon words in Anglo-Norman, and from the examples he gives we may probably ascribe them to the first half of the twelfth century. This would seem to show that even a foreigner, employed as a teacher in England, had to use the Anglo-Saxon Latin grammar in his school, although his own knowledge of Anglo-Saxon was so imperfect that he was obliged to add a translation of the Anglo-Saxon words into Anglo-Norman for his own use. Further than this, Sir Thomas Phillipps found among the archives of Worcester cathedral some leaves of a copy of Alfric's grammar, written in the degraded form of the Anglo-Saxon language which prevailed in the middle and latter half of the twelfth century. The Anglo-Saxon language had at this time undergone considerable degradation from the form it presented in the eleventh century. It was rapidly losing *its grammatical* inflections, and in its words broad sounds were exchanged

for softer and quicker ones. Thus the final *a* was constantly exchanged for *e*, and the prefix *ge* was everywhere turned into *y* or *i*. For *cempa*, a champion, they said *kempe*; for *gemetung*, a meeting, they said *imeting*; and for *gerefa*, a prefect, they would say *ireve*. With this change, however, there was no considerable introduction of Norman words. It was pure Anglo-Saxon as to the substance, but degraded in its forms. Philologists have given to the language in this state of transition the name of semi-Saxon. We can trace its progress in several literary monuments of importance. The latter years of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, which was continued to 1145, exhibit the language as already breaking very fast; in the metrical chronicle of Layamon, and in the metrical harmony of the gospels called the Ormulum, which were both probably written in the closing years of the twelfth century, the Anglo-Saxon grammatical forms have undergone an entire change, which is still more complete in the semi-Saxon text of the *Regulæ Inclusarum*, or rule of nuns, in the earlier half of the thirteenth century. It is evident from the character of these, and other literary remains of less importance, that the use of the English language, during the twelfth and first half of the thirteenth centuries, was by no means confined to the lower classes of society, but it prevailed generally among the middle and educated classes, and among the clergy and in the monastic houses, at least in those devoted to females.

It was in the middle of the thirteenth century, when the national spirit of the English people showed itself in the great popular struggle under Simon de Montfort, that the English language, which has now emerged from that transition state under which it has been known as semi-Saxon, at length asserted what we may call its political rights, and reappeared in the court. The political songs, and other writings, composed during the civil strife known as the barons' wars, show us not only two, but three languages, co-existing in this country at the same time. These were, the English, the Anglo-Norman, (or, as it was usually called at the time, the French), and the Latin, of which we need not take the latter into consideration, as it belonged almost exclusively to the clergy.

The long continued existence of what we call the Anglo-Norman language in this country was not a mere accident, but it was a consequence of the political condition of Europe. The feudal aristocracy was united throughout the whole extent of feudalism, by a community of interests as well as feelings, to such a degree, that the nobles of one country felt a closer re-

lationship with those of another than with the unaristocratic classes of their own countries or even with their own sovereign. This was so much the case that, until the spirit of feudal society began to decline, it was no uncommon thing for a baron to hold fiefs in the dominions of several different sovereigns, and to form his alliances sometimes with the barons of one of these countries and sometimes with those of another. A common language was, therefore, a necessary element in the system; and as feudalism had originated in France, and took its greatest development there, French became its universal language. It was, then, not only as the language of the Normans, but as that peculiarly of the feudal aristocracy in general, that French was introduced into England under William the Conqueror, and it was in that character that it continued to be the language of the aristocracy of England until feudalism itself was broken down. It had ceased, however, to be their exclusive language in the thirteenth century. In the latter years of that century, a tract or treatise was written in French or Anglo-Norman verse, forming a sort of vocabulary of that language, and designed expressly for the purpose of teaching it to children. The number of copies of this tract still preserved in MS. show that it was a popular elementary book, and that it was in extensive use. The compiler was Walter de Bibbesworth, a man known elsewhere as a writer of French verse and apparently belonging himself to the aristocratic class; he was a friend of the great statesman of the reign of Edward I, Henry de Lacy earl of Lincoln and Salisbury, and compiled the treatise we are speaking of at the request of the lady Dionysia de Monchensey. Thus all the relations of the author and of his book were of an aristocratic character. Now Walter de Bibbesworth states his object to be to instruct the rising generation in the proper use of the words of the French language, and especially in the correct application of the genders, and the French words are explained in English, implying thus that the learner was acquainted with the English language before he began to learn French. We thus ascertain the very important fact that, before the end of the thirteenth century, the children of the aristocracy of England learned English before they were instructed in any other language, or, in other words, that English had become their mother tongue.*

* This very curious monument of the educational system of the middle ages will be printed in a volume of medieval vocabularies, Anglo-Saxon, Anglo-Norman, and English, *now preparing* for publication at the expense of Mr. Joseph Mayer, of Liverpool, to

Although, therefore, French was no doubt still looked upon as the peculiar language of the aristocracy, a new modification had taken place in the mutual position of the two languages, for, instead of their mere co-existence in the same country, but in two different classes or great divisions of society, we have them now coexistent in the same class. This change marked what may be considered as the birth of modern English literature. The English language now began among the aristocracy and at court to be adopted as that of our national poetry and prose, and to step into the place which had been usurped almost exclusively by the French or Anglo-Norman language during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. With it, also, began the intermingling of the two languages, in consequence of which a large portion of the Anglo-Saxon language gradually became obsolete.

It is necessary, however, that this process of intermingling and becoming obsolete should itself be explained, for we should form a very erroneous opinion if we supposed, as some who have treated on the subject seem to suppose, that there was any design or plan in the mixture. You will easily conceive how people talking equally among themselves two different languages would be continually tempted to use, in one language, a word or words taken from the other, either because it was a favourite word with them, or, more usually, because it presented a more familiar picture of the object it was used to designate. Much more would this interchange of words take place, in the intercommunication between the class which used both languages and that which used nothing but English in regard of a number of words from the French language which custom had begun to affix to certain objects. Thus, we know well that the Anglo-Saxon table was formed merely by placing a board upon trestles at the time of eating, and that it was designated simply by the name of a *board*. Permanent tables were probably known to the Saxon portion of our population only through the Normans, and as the former constantly heard them spoken of by this French name of *table*, they would naturally learn the word themselves, and, if they did not use it at first indiscriminately for the old description of table as well as the new one, it would become so completely identified with the latter, that we are not surprised at the older English

whom not only the Historic Society, but the science of Archæology in general, is under so many obligations. These vocabularies are extremely valuable, as illustrating not only the history of our language, but the manners and condition of our forefathers.

word being lost as the old practice was discontinued. In fact the Saxon word for a table can hardly be said to belong to the English language at the present day, yet, though we should be surprised at hearing anybody call a table a board, we still use the word in certain phrases derived from ancient customs, and we speak of a "festive board," and talk of giving people "board and lodging," and of sitting at a council or committee board. Again, we know that an Anglo-Norman would call a sheep a *mutton*, while an Englishman of the Saxon race would call it a *sheep*. Now we know that in feudal times nearly the whole of the animal provisions of the estate was swept off into the castle or mansion of the landlord, where it was consumed in extravagant hospitality or salted down to keep in store for occasions when fresh meat could not be procured. There can be little doubt from what we know of the condition of the people in the feudal ages, that the agricultural population, who among themselves knew the various animals alive by their Anglo-Saxon names, rarely tasted their flesh except when they sat in the halls or kitchens of their landlords, where they would hear it spoken of, and must ask for it, only by its Anglo-Norman name. Hence they would gradually become accustomed to call the animal a *sheep*, and the flesh of it, when dead, *mutton*. Thus we see how our language has become enriched by adopting in some cases the originally synonymous words of the two languages, and giving them a somewhat different meaning. All the usual articles of animal food have fallen under the circumstances of the example just given. We speak of beef, mutton, veal, pork, by their Anglo-Norman names, while we continue to call the living animals by their Anglo-Saxon names of oxen, sheep, calves, and swine. Words connected with cooking have been similarly exchanged. Thus, the Anglo-Saxon word *brædan* or *bredan*, to roast, has disappeared from our language, and the word we have adopted in its place is derived from the Anglo-Norman *rostir*, the modern French *rôtir*. Roasting was in the middle ages practised chiefly with regard to fowls and smaller animals, while substantial meat was much more commonly boiled, perhaps partly from the circumstance that so great a portion of it was salted. Hence the Anglo-Saxon word *seothan*, to boil, held its position in the language much longer than *brædan*; and its representative, to *seethe*, can hardly yet be said to have become obsolete. Nevertheless, *it has virtually been long displaced by the Anglo-Norman word, to boil. Similarly the Anglo-Saxon word, hyrstan, to fry, has been expelled by the*

Anglo-Norman equivalent. The adoption of Anglo-Norman words in cookery may be explained by the same causes which influenced the change of the names of meats. The artizan and the manufacturer, on the other hand, have generally preserved the Anglo-Saxon names connected with their occupations, although we find these exchanged sometimes for Anglo-Norman, under circumstances of which it would not be easy to give an explanation. Thus we learn from the vocabularies that the Anglo-Saxon name for a carpenter's plane was *locer*, which appears to have become obsolete early in the Anglo-Norman period, for we have long known no other than the Anglo-Norman name. Indeed, it would be most dangerous to attempt to form any general rule upon such examples as these, for, whatever rule it might be, when we attempt to apply it we should find nothing but exceptions. Thus, from the strictness with which game was preserved by the feudal barons, we might suppose that the different animals which came under that designation would have received Anglo-Norman names, yet the names the animals of the chase still bear in our language, such as a deer, a hart, a roe, a hare, are all Anglo-Saxon, while, singularly enough, among the birds which come under the head of game the partridge has lost its Anglo-Saxon names of *ærsce-henn* or *rephung*, the pheasant perhaps that of *wor-hana*,* and the heron that of *hragra*, in order to take their present names which are purely Anglo-Norman. As war was so peculiarly the business of the feudal aristocracy, we might suppose that at all events the names for arms would be Anglo-Norman, yet we find that this is not the case, for we speak of a *sword* and not of an *épée*, of *bows* and *arrows* instead of *arcs* and *fletches*, and we even usually call the *lance*, the distinctive arm of the knight, by its Anglo-Saxon name of a *spear*. What is still more remarkable, our language has preserved the Anglo-Saxon word *knight* to distinguish the feudal warrior himself, instead of his Anglo-Norman name of *chevalier*. In the derivative from this word, however, although the two court poets of their age, Chaucer and Gower, used the English word *knighthode* for chivalry, the

* It has been said, I know not on what authority, that the pheasant is a comparatively modern importation into our island. I can only say that it was certainly commonly known here in the twelfth century, and I am not aware of any reason for supposing that it was then a novelty. In the treatises on cookery and the service of the table, compiled in the fourteenth century, we have directions for dressing and serving it, as well as for catching it in the books on *Venerie*. The early Anglo-Saxon vocabularies interpret the Latin *phasianus* by *wor-hana*, which has been conjectured to mean a weed-hen.

French word has subsequently superseded it. When we go to other classes of subjects, the caprice shown in the adoption of words from either language is still more incomprehensible. Thus, it would be difficult to say why, among flowers, we have adopted the Anglo-Norman names of lilies, violets, dandelion, germander, plantain, &c., and have retained the Anglo-Saxon ones of daises, cowslips, thistles, honeysuckles, and a numerous list of others; or why, in some cases, we have preserved the Anglo-Saxon names of fish, such as whales, seals, lobsters, crabs, eels, &c., when others have been abandoned to adopt in their places such names as salmon, tenches, sturgeons, gudgeons, perches, lampreys, and some others, which are Anglo-Norman. We can indeed discover no general law or rule which influenced in any degree the adoption of particular words from one language or the other. The two languages continued long to exist independently, and people who wrote in English might adopt at their own caprice a word from one or the other.

In one respect, however, these two languages in England stood on a very different footing, for, while the Anglo-Norman words which were finally rejected from our written language, ceased to exist among us with the language itself, a vast number of the Anglo-Saxon words which disappeared from the English language as it was written and spoken in cultivated society, were preserved among the populace and the peasantry, and contributed to form the trivial language of the common people, or, much more extensively, of our provincial dialects. Words are easily rejected from the language of cultivated society, but the tenacity with which the peasantry especially, and the lower classes of the population generally, retain the old words and phraseology of their mother tongue, through many ages, is truly extraordinary. One or two examples have occurred to me which I think deserve to be remembered. The Anglo-Saxon vocabulary of archbishop Alfric, compiled in the tenth century, gives the Latin and Anglo-Saxon equivalents, "*constructio, vel instructio, hyrdung.*" The modern Anglo-Saxon lexicographers, puzzled by the Latin words, appear to have been able to make nothing of the Anglo-Saxon word *hyrdung*, and have given it in their dictionaries without explanation. The natural derivation of it would be from the verb *hyrdan*, to guard, or keep. Now, you can hardly pass for any length of time through the streets of our larger towns without seeing, in one place or another, a house in the process of repairing or *rebuilding*, and you will generally see that it is surrounded with a tolerably

lofty and strong frame-work of boards, for the protection of the work and the workmen. If you ask the latter what they call this wooden frame-work, they will tell you at once a *hoarding*. I have little doubt that this is the identical *hyrdung* of the Anglo-Saxon vocabulary, especially as it is there placed among one or two other words connected with building; and you will thus see that our common builders have actually preserved during the vicissitudes of eight centuries a word which seemed so entirely lost to the world that by them alone we are able to give it an explanation in an Anglo-Saxon dictionary. An English-Latin dictionary of the fifteenth century, known by the title of the *Promptorium Parvulorum*, furnishes us with another example. You will there find, under the letter L, the words, "Locchester, wyrm," meaning that *locchester* was the name of a kind of worm, and the Latin equivalent *multipes* is added. Now as the word *worm* had in Anglo-Saxon and Old-English a very extensive meaning, and as the Latin *multipes*, meaning simply an animal with many feet, was not much more definite; the modern editor of the *Promptorium Parvulorum*, Mr. Way, was unable to fix the exact meaning of the English word—and there seemed no means left of ascertaining it, until, two or three years ago, my friend, Mr. Halliwell, walking in a garden in Oxfordshire, accidentally overheard the gardener talking about *lockchesters*, and immediately asking him what these were, received for answer that they were *woodlice*. On a further inquiry he ascertained that *lockchest*, or *lockchester*, was not an uncommon word in some parts of Oxfordshire for a woodlouse, although it was rapidly going out of use. As the *Promptorium Parvulorum* was compiled in Norfolk, this must, in the fifteenth century, have been an ordinary word for a *woodlouse*, and not confined to a particular locality. Again, reading one of the comedies of the age of Charles II., "The Cheats," published in 1662, the scene of which is laid in London, I meet with the following language, put into the mouth of one of the characters: "O my child, my child, thy father is prettie *hoddie* again, but this will break his heart quite." The old dictionaries give the word *hoddy* as meaning hearty, or strong, but I have looked in vain for it in any dictionary of the present day, until I happened to open a glossary of the East Anglian dialect, where I find that the word still exists in the sense of "well; in good spirits." It appears clear, from this and other examples which I could quote from the writings of the same period, that a multitude of words were in general use in the common language of England so late as the latter half of the

seventeenth century, which now exist only in some local dialect. This shows us the great importance, in a philological point of view, if in no other, of collecting and publishing the words of our provincial dialects.

These dialects show us in many ways the curious manner in which the Anglo-Saxon language was broken up for the formation of modern English. It must not be supposed that Anglo-Saxon words became obsolete merely because they were displaced from the English language by Anglo-Norman words, for words of Anglo-Saxon origin were continually displacing one another. In the first place, the Anglo-Saxon language, as I have remarked before, was copious in words, and it often happens that out of a number of names for the same thing, or verbs expressing the same or a similar action, one or two only have survived. In the second place, it seems evident that among the Anglo-Saxons themselves there were numerous words, then only used in popular conversation or in particular districts, which, in the course of time, gained the superiority over their prouder synonyms, and finally superseded them. Hence, while a great number of what are known to have been good Anglo-Saxon words have been expelled from the English language, their places have been taken by others, also no doubt Anglo-Saxon, which are so strange to us that all we can absolutely say of them is, that they are not Anglo-Norman. This, also, will perhaps be best illustrated by a few examples. I will take the first from the language of agriculture. The only word we find used in the Anglo-Saxon writers for a plough is *sulh*, yet we are certain that some such word as *ploh* or *plog*, with this meaning, did exist in that language, not only because we know that plough is not an Anglo-Norman word, but because we find the word *ploh* used once in the Anglo-Saxon laws to signify what was afterwards called a *ploughland*, because an Anglo-Saxon ecclesiastical document speaks of a tax levied by the church on the agriculturists under the title of *plou-almesse*, for which another document gives the synonym *sulh-almesse*, and because, further, we find the representative of the word in the modern German is *pflug*. What, therefore, must have been in the Anglo-Saxon period only a popular, or an almost obsolete name for a plough, has actually in the modern English language superseded the regular Anglo-Saxon name of a plough, *sulh*, which now only exists in the dialects of the West of England, where a plow is still called by the peasantry a *sull*, *sullow*, or *soul*.* The Anglo-Saxons had several verbs to signify the operation of

* It is curious that the word *sullow* for a plough, with *bannut* for a walnut, and one

ploughing, such as *erian*, *fyrian*, and *tilian*. Of these, the first, in the form to *ere* or to *ear*, remained in general use in the English language until the sixteenth century, and is perhaps still in use in some of the local dialects. *Fyrian* is only retained in the sense of to furrow, or make furrows; and *tilian* remains in the more general sense of to *till* the ground. We now, in English, call the operation only *ploughing*, from the name of the machine used in performing it. Again, the only Anglo-Saxon word we know for a window is *eage-thyrl*, meaning literally an eye-hole, from which we derive a more vivid picture of the sort of openings by which the interior of an Anglo-Saxon house was lighted than a long description would convey to us. Larger openings for light came into use probably in Norman times, and they, as well as all windows, were called by the Anglo-Normans *fenestres*, in modern French *fenêtres*. It is a curious circumstance that the Teutonic dialects on the Continent have generally adopted the French word, which of course represents the Latin *fenestra*; in modern German a window is called a *fenster*. Yet the English language has thrown off what would have been its Anglo-Norman word *fenester*, and has retained in its place not the Anglo-Saxon word we know, but another, which does not occur among the words of the Anglo-Saxon language that have been preserved, though I think that the English word *window* is found as early as the thirteenth century, and it is doubtless a purely Anglo-Saxon word, and bears the same relation to *wind* which the Spanish word *ventana* for a window bears to *viento*. Again, among the Anglo-Saxon names for a sword are *sweord*, *seax*, *bill*, *brand*, *mece*, and *ord*. Of these, the last signified literally the edge of a weapon, and it and the three preceding words belong properly to the language of poetry, and therefore soon became obsolete. The word *seax* has also been lost, and *sword* has superseded all the others. The principal Anglo-Saxon words for an arrow were *arewa*, *fla*, *sceaft*, and *strel*. The first is the only one of the four which remains in its original sense, although *fla* or *flo* was retained till the fifteenth century, and in Sussex they still call an arrow a *strel*. The common

or two other words, now peculiar to the dialects in the west of England, and not found, as far as I know, in any of the old English writers, occurs in a Latin and English vocabulary of the earlier part of the fifteenth century, printed in the same volume of vocabularies mentioned in a former note as preparing for publication under the auspices of Mr. Mayer, and evidently compiled in that part of the island. This would seem to show that even the verbal peculiarities of the principal English dialects are much older than we might otherwise be led to suppose, and perhaps even this has some connection with the history of the word *sulk* and *plough*, as given in the text.

Anglo-Saxon names for a river, taking them in alphabetical order, were, *becc*, *broc*, *burne*, *ea*, *flood*, *rith*, or *ryth*, and *stream*. The precedence of all these has been taken by the Anglo-Norman word *rivere*. The word *ea*, which appears to have been the most general Anglo-Saxon word for a river, has only remained in the innumerable names of localities, into the composition of which it enters. *Rith* is also lost. *Broc* remains in the modern *brook*, while *burn* is preserved in a similar sense in the dialects of the North of England, and *becc* continues to exist in the *beck* of some of the northern provincial dialects, and in the *bach* of the dialects of the Welsh border. Of the ordinary Anglo-Saxon names for a hall, *heal*, *caffertun*, *inburh*, *sal*, and *sele*, the first is the only one preserved in the English language, although the two last might have been supposed to have had the greater chance of lasting, as being identical with the Anglo-Norman word *sale*. Another curious instance of the capricious character of these word-revolutions and vicissitudes in our language is furnished by the names of the rabbit. It is somewhat remarkable that the Anglo-Saxon dictionaries give us no word for a rabbit, but from the thirteenth to the beginning of the last century the common English name for this animal was a *conig* or *cony*. There is some room for doubt whether this word be Anglo-Norman, in which language a rabbit was called a *connil* or *connin*, or whether it be of Anglo-Saxon origin, for the same animal is still called in German *kaninchen*. Both, no doubt, represent the Latin *cuniculus*. But this word *cony*, for some cause or other, was in the last century entirely superseded by that of *rabbit*, which must no doubt have been an Anglo-Saxon word, because it is found in another Low German dialect, the Dutch, under the forms *robbe* and *robbekin*. It is found in the *Promptorium Parvulorum* of the fifteenth century with the signification of a young rabbit—"Rabet, yonge conye, *cunicellus*." I do not remember having met with the word in the English language at an earlier period. I may quote another example of the movements and vicissitudes of words in our language from the nomenclature of birds. The Anglo-Saxon vocabularies give to the Latin word *turdus*, the two interpretations *seric* and *ster*, and they explain the Latin *merula* by *thrisc* or *throsle*. Yet the Latin *turdus* is usually understood as meaning a thrush, and *merula* as signifying a blackbird. Under the Anglo-Normans the word *mauviz*, anglicised into *mavis*, was introduced to signify a thrush, and almost superseded the latter word in the English language, although *throstel*, or more usually

thrystel-cock, continued to be used. At the same time, the Anglo-Norman word *merle*, from the Latin *merula*, came in to signify a blackbird. This shows that the original meaning of the Latin *merula* was well known, and would lead us almost to suppose that the Anglo-Saxons may have meant a blackbird by *thriac* and *throstle*. The English glossaries of the fifteenth century still interpret *merula* by *thrystel-cock*, and *mauvis* continued to be the English word for a thrush, and it long held its place in the language of literature. Nevertheless, the Anglo-Saxon words *thrush* and *throstle* have finally regained their position as the sole acknowledged names, in the English language, of the song-thrush, and have expelled their Anglo-Norman equivalent *mavis*, and in this case it is the Anglo-Norman word that remains in our dialects. In the north of Essex, and I believe in other parts of East Anglia, a singing thrush is still called a *mavis*. One of the Anglo-Saxon equivalents of the Latin *turdus* is preserved in the *schreech-thrush*, a provincial name for the missel-thrush; and the other, *stare*, is now used in the signification of a starling. Again, the names cowslip, or cowslop, (*cusloppa*), and oxslip (*oxan-slip*), are purely Anglo-Saxon, and have preserved their place in the language—though not quite undisputed, for another word *paigle*, the derivation of which seems very uncertain, though its form appears to bespeak an Anglo-Norman origin, had intruded itself into the English language before the sixteenth century. There is some reason for believing that the *paigle* was originally the oxslip. It was a word in common use among the English writers of the Elizabethan period; yet it has now dropped into a provincial word, and, singularly enough, in Essex it seems to have changed places with cowslip. In the neighbourhood of Saffron-Walden the name *paigle* is given to the common cowslip (the *primula veris*), while the oxslip (the *primula elatior*), which is very abundant there, is called a *cowslip*. The language of natural history was especially rich and copious among our forefathers, whether Anglo-Saxon or English, which seems to show the existence among all classes, and at all periods, of a great love for nature, and a tendency to observe natural objects. In the comparatively small proportion which remains of the popular language of the Anglo-Saxons, we find numerous synonyms for plants, animals, birds, &c., many of which have been since lost, though some are preserved in a remarkable manner, and where we should least expect it. It is from this class of words especially that our provincial dialects are enriched.

Thus, our Anglo-Saxon forefathers called a grasshopper a *gærs-hoppa* (grass-hopper), or a *gærs-stapa* (grass-stepper), or a *hama*, or a *hil-hama*, or a *secge-scere* (sedge-shearer), the first of which names only is preserved in the English language, and I am not aware that any of the others exist even in our local dialects. I find a woodlouse called, in vocabularies of the fifteenth century, a *locchester*, a *loklore*, and a *welbode*; and in those of the sixteenth a *cheselip*, or *cheslop*, a *kitchin-bole*, and a *woodlouse*. Of these, the last only will be found in a dictionary of modern English, but I have already remarked that the name of *lockchester* is preserved among the peasantry of Oxfordshire, and I may add, that the peasantry in the North of England still call a woodlouse a *kitchen-ball*, and that those of the Southern dialects call it a *chissel-bol*, which is perhaps the representative of *cheslop*. The other two names appear to have become quite obsolete. In the *Nomenclator*, a copious Latin and English vocabulary, published in the year 1585, we have three synonyms for the glowworm, namely, *glowbird*, *glowworm*, and *lightworm*. I think that I have heard a glowworm called a *glowbird* in some one of our local dialects. The same vocabulary gives to a well-known plant, the *leontodon tarazacum*, the several names following: *dandelion*, *priest's crown*, *swine's snout*, *monk's head*, *dog's teeth*, and *common cicorie*. The first of these names, which is derived from the French, is the only one of them now acknowledged in the English language; I am not aware that any of the others are in use. The same vocabulary gives as synonyms, *libbard's bane* (i.e. leopard's bane), *wolf's bane*, and *monk's hood*. All these three names of plants are still preserved, but the first is applied to the *doronicum pardalianches*, and the two others to the *aconitum napellus*. Two names of the latter are recorded in the vocabularies of the Anglo-Saxon period, *on-red* and *thung*, neither of which is preserved in the language. These few examples, which might be multiplied almost infinitely, will, I think, sufficiently explain how words have disappeared, and reappeared, in our language, and in its provincial dialects, and at the same time show that the further investigation of this part of the subject would not be without interest.

But it is here a digression, which I must follow no longer. As I have already stated, the two languages representing Anglo-Saxon and Anglo-Norman, but which at this period we may better describe as French and English, continued to exist in England independently during the whole of the fourteenth century, although there was a constant interchange

of words going on between them. I do not mean to say that this interchange was then a permanent one, although a certain number of Anglo-Norman words had already been firmly engrafted on the English tongue. We have no means of knowing what was the exact character of the language of popular conversation at this period, which we may, however, suppose to have been still very decidedly Saxon ; but we know that an English writer used just as many French words as he pleased, or as suited the class of readers to whom he addressed himself. Thus, one of the most remarkable poems in our language, the Visions of Piers Ploughman, which was put forth as the grand proclamation of a demand for popular reform and of the doctrines of popular freedom, is written not only in a language which contains a very small number of Anglo-Norman words, but it is composed in the same form of alliterative verse, without rhymes, which was peculiarly characteristic of pure Anglo-Saxon poetry. This sudden reappearance of the ancient Anglo-Saxon form of versification in the middle of the fourteenth century is itself a remarkable phenomenon, and it is an equally curious circumstance that this description of versification, which became thenceforward for some time popular among the people, is generally filled with a great number of purely Anglo-Saxon words, of a sort which we had long missed in English literature, and which we had every reason for believing had long become obsolete. Yet it is not likely that men who wrote for popularity would use obsolete words, which they would hardly be likely to understand themselves, and which certainly would not be understood by their hearers or readers. We must, therefore, conclude that even down to the end of the fourteenth century, "among the people," the mass of the words of the Anglo-Saxon language, much of its phraseology und construction, and even its forms of versification, continued to exist.

On the other hand, when people wrote for the aristocracy, or for the court, they adopted the French forms of verse, and filled their language with what we should now consider an extravagant proportion of French words. Such is the case in a great degree with Chaucer, who has been very erroneously termed "a well of English undefiled ;" and the reason why the writings of Chaucer are more easily understood by people in general than Piers Ploughman, or many of the other literary monuments of the time, must be sought in the circumstance that a great proportion of the obsolete words in Chaucer are French, while nearly all those in the other

